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ABSTRACT

This informational brochure for parents of children with behavior disorders discusses positive behavioral support that focuses on rewarding appropriate behavior, altering environments, and teaching appropriate social, academic, or behavior skills. It explains that functional behavioral assessments can identify triggers of inappropriate behavior and discusses the steps of such an assessment. Parents are provided with the following eight strategies for encouraging appropriate behavior: (1) change the environment by providing a quiet place in the classroom, providing more space, or changing where the child sits in the classroom; (2) appreciate positive behavior through praise, positive comment and sincere affection; (3) make things predictable to ensure children feel secure; (4) give choices whenever possible to avoid power struggles that lead to inappropriate behavior; (5) adapt the curriculum; (6) provide extra support for the child to avoid frustration that could lead to inappropriate behavior; (7) provide extra support for the school staff, such as training and additional time; and (8) monitor improvement. (CR)

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DO YOU KNOW...

Parent's Role in Behavior Interventions

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1

INFORMATION BROCHURE

SEPTEMBER 2000

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Do You Know ...

Vol. 3 No. 1 Information brochure September 2000

Parent's Role in Behavior Interventions

How will the school address my child's behavior?

Before a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) was mandated for students with disabilities, almost a million students were excluded entirely from attending public school. Because some students with disabilities were judged too difficult to educate, Congress passed a law in 1975 assuring a free and appropriate public education. This law is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. In 1997 Congress made some changes to IDEA. The new law emphasizes preventing behavior problems before they happen.

If your child receives special education services, IDEA gives the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team the responsibility of addressing student behavior. Remember you are a member of that team. You should plan ahead and discuss any possible behavioral difficulties your child might have. Read the school rules and behavioral expectations and ask yourself:

- Can my child control her behavior?
- Can he follow the school rules?
- Does she understand what will happen if she doesn't follow the rules?

If you answer yes to all these questions, you will want your child to meet the same expectations as her classmates. However, if your child's behavior interferes with his learning or the learning of others and you answered no to any of the questions above, the IEP team must decide what to do about your child's behavior as part of the IEP process.

IDEA states that your child's IEP team shall:

"... in the case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, consider, if appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior."
34CFR Section 300.346 (a)(2)(i)

What does positive behavioral support mean?

All behavior serves two purposes: to get something or to avoid something. Children behave in whatever way works best to get attention or control. They will use whatever way works best to avoid a person, task, or situation. Sometimes these ways are not acceptable in the classroom.

Behavior is how we act and react. Some children behave in an appropriate manner, others use challenging behavior to meet their needs. This challenging behavior may interfere with their learning and the learning of others. Behavior happens for a reason. Positive behavioral support helps to understand the purpose of inappropriate behavior. Positive behavioral support teaches the skills necessary to replace the inappropriate behavior with acceptable ways of acting and reacting. The child can then substitute acceptable behavior that meets his needs. The child can learn better ways to make her feelings and needs known to teachers or parents.

A positive behavioral support plan is different than traditional behavior management. Behavior management plans were designed to focus on the student. The goal was to stop the undesired behavior, often with punishment. Research has shown that punishment will stop one behavior in one setting, but the student will replace that behavior with a different, even worse, behavior. Positive behavior support replaces undesired behavior with new behavior or skills. The child can then use this new behavior in a variety of places, in and out of school.

Positive behavioral support does not focus on changing the student and stopping the inappropriate behavior. Rewarding appropriate behavior, altering environments, and teaching appropriate social, academic or behavior skills are some positive behavioral support strategies.

What is a functional behavioral assessment?

The first step to set up a positive behavioral support plan is to understand what is causing the behavior. What use or "function" does the behavior have for your child? Does it get him attention? Does it get her away from an uncomfortable situation? Does it get him out of a situation where he can't perform well or would be embarrassed in front of his classmates? Inappropriate behaviors do not happen repeatedly without a reason.

Finding that reason is called a "Functional Behavioral Assessment" because it tries to understand the "function" or use of the behavior. This finding-out process is a method of collecting and testing information. It should include observations of your child's behavior. It could also include interviewing you, your child, your child's teacher and other school staff who know your child.

A functional behavioral assessment should answer the questions about your child's behavior. To prepare for these discussions, ask yourself the following:

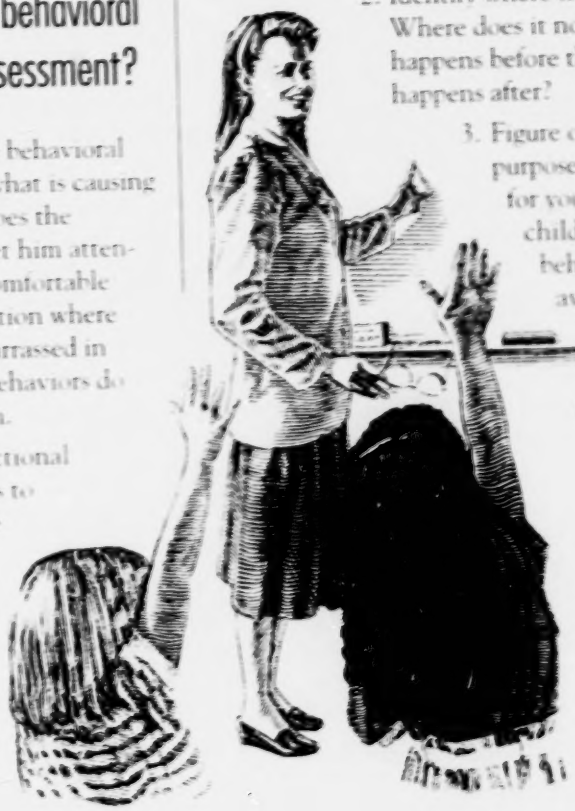
- What triggers your child's inappropriate behavior?
- What does the inappropriate behavior look like?
- How often does it happen?
- When is it least likely to happen?
- How long does it last? How do you or the teacher react?
- How much is it interfering with your child's learning?

In addition to observing your child and asking questions of those who know your child best, more formal testing may need to be done and other consultants may need to be involved.

A functional behavioral assessment should:

1. Describe the behavior exactly. This should be in specific, observable, and non-judgmental terms. Anyone hearing the description of the behavior should know what it is.
2. Identify where the behavior happens. Where does it not happen? What happens before the behavior? What happens after?
3. Figure out the most likely purpose or use of the behavior for your child. What is your child gaining from this behavior? What is she avoiding because of it?
4. Develop a "best guess" (hypothesis) about why this behavior happens when and where it does.

When the IEP team knows why and when the child has a behavior that is unacceptable, ways to avoid or change those situations can be explored.



What strategies could be used to encourage my child's appropriate behavior?

Strategies to encourage changes in behavior may be part of an individual behavioral improvement plan for your child. Now that you and the school have a good idea about what causes your child to behave inappropriately some careful planning can take place to prevent inappropriate behavior before it happens.

1 **Change the environment**—The environment should be organized for success. If you know that your child is sensitive to noise, the school could provide earphones or a quiet place in the classroom during noisy times. If your child reacts to smells, textures or colors, accommodations might be made to avoid problems. Your child may need his space clearly defined. Or he may need more space to avoid bumping others or being bumped. If your child does not see or hear well, sitting up front will help her succeed. If your child's behavior is distracting, sitting in the back of the classroom might work best. Sitting next to children who demonstrate appropriate behavior could be desirable. On the other hand, there may be other children who may not be desirable neighbors.

2 **Appreciate positive behavior**—A reward for one child may not be a reward for another. When your child is rewarded for appropriate behavior those behaviors will likely happen again. Praise, positive comments, and sincere affection from teachers work for most children. Some children may need more tangible rewards.

3 **Make things predictable**—Children feel secure when they know what will happen next. Make sure your child knows what to do and when to do it. Teach her where to go, what supplies to bring, and if talking is allowed. Ask the teacher for the daily routine and help your child learn the schedule. A daily activity chart might help. With the teacher, you can prepare your child for any changes in the daily routine. Discuss and practice for the unexpected such as fire and tornado drills or for what will happen if there is a substitute teacher or paraprofessional (aide).

4 **Give choices whenever possible**—Your child feels in control when he can make some of his own choices. Allow your child to make a choice from several acceptable alternatives. If your child is trying to avoid a task, provide several tasks from which to choose. Young children can choose what to wear from two coordinated outfits. Honor the choices the child makes. Children need to practice making choices to learn to make decisions as grown-ups. Giving choices avoids power struggles that lead to inappropriate behavior.

5 **Adapt the curriculum**—Your child will behave appropriately if she is interested in what is being taught and is not frustrated by the level of difficulty. Find out how your child learns best. Does he remember things he has seen or does he need to hear information? Perhaps she understands things she can touch and feel. Teachers can use all of these methods to get information to students. Does your child need assignments shortened to avoid frustration at not getting done with the other students? Is your child bored because the pace of the class is too slow? Does she need more stimulation to keep her interest and avoid inappropriate behavior?

6 **Provide extra support for your child**—Children with challenging behavior may need more support with academic and social skills to avoid frustration that could lead to inappropriate behavior. Talk with the other members of the IEP team to decide if your child might need more help from the teacher, from an aide or from other students. Peer tutoring, instruction by another student, may be helpful.

7 **Provide extra support for the school staff**—Discuss training that might be needed for staff who work with your child. For example, if your child has autism, the staff may need some specialized training in understanding autism and learning effective strategies. Teachers may need additional time for collaborative planning for addressing your child's challenging behavior.

8 **Monitor improvement**—How will progress be measured? The IEP team must decide. What is each person's responsibility in carrying out the positive behavior support strategies? When will the IEP team reconvene to discuss how the strategies are working? Does the plan need to be changed?

What do I need to know if the school takes disciplinary action?

It is important that you understand the difference in the discipline actions the school may propose. To understand what it means if your child is suspended, put in an alternative placement, or expelled, read the *Do You Know … Parents Role in Discipline Decisions* (published fall 2000).

For more information and resources on behavior interventions, contact:

Local school district

Your child's teacher(s), building principal, or director of special education can help answer questions you may have.

Missouri Parents Act

MPACT is the parent training and information center for parents of children with disabilities. Some resources include the *Do You Know* Parent's Role brochures series, and *Building a Bridge to the Future for Young Adults with Disabilities in Missouri*, a workbook to guide the lifelong process of transition.

1-877-588-5644 outside Kansas City
(816) 531-7070 in Kansas City
www.cm.org/mpact

Center for Innovations in Special Education (CISE)

Resources on behavior and other topics can be borrowed from the CISE library or ordered through the online library catalog.

1-800-976-2473 (MO only)
(573) 884-7275
www.coe.missouri.edu/~mocise

Special Education Compliance Section–Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

(573) 751-0699
Fax: (573) 526=4404
www.dese.state.mo.us/divspeced/

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